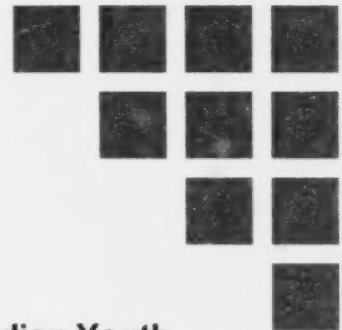

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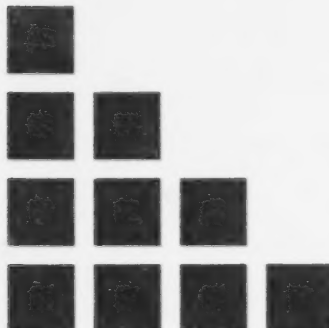


**Policy Research Issues for Canadian Youth
An Overview of Human Capital
In Rural and Urban Areas**

R-01-4-3E

**by
E. Dianne Looker
October 2001**

Research Paper



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**Applied Research Branch
Strategic Policy
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Abstract

This paper examines a number of issues related to human capital development in Canadian rural and urban youth, based on the available English language research literature. Despite the heterogeneity evident across rural areas and the variation in definitions of what constitutes a "rural" or an "urban" area, there are some fairly consistent rural-urban differences reported in the literature. Much of the research seems to emphasize the negative aspects of life in rural areas, despite the fact that rural residents themselves more often emphasize the benefits of living where they do, and other research confirms that rural residents often report that they have a high quality of life.

On the other side of the picture rural youth tend to have lower levels of educational expectations – which in turn tends to result in lower levels of educational attainment. This pattern is evident in the higher proportions of rural youth (particularly males) who drop out before completing high school, and in the proportionately lower numbers of rural youth who attend or complete university studies. Although rural schools and rural teachers are implicated in these lower aspirations and attainments, rural youth and their parents have a very high regard for their schools. Rural schools, particularly those that are small, are seen as being well integrated into the community; teachers have high levels of contact with the students and their families; and students often play a more active role in their schools than is the case in larger urban schools. These benefits, to some extent, counterbalance the limitations of small rural schools in terms of the number and diversity of courses they can offer, and the fewer support services they can afford.

In terms of occupational outcomes, rural youth tend to aspire to and go into lower-status positions (fewer professional occupations, more semi-skilled and unskilled); they are more likely to report bouts of unemployment and they are less likely to have full-time, full-year employment. The labour force participation rates of rural youth tend to be lower than in urban areas and wages for those with employment are lower, although there is considerable variation across time and across regions of the country. Nevertheless, there is at best weak support for the idea that increasing the human capital of rural youth through education or training would stimulate economic development in rural areas. Youth out-migration is a concern for both rural communities and policy makers. Rural teenagers tend to leave their communities to pursue post-secondary education, and, despite strong ties to their communities, only a fraction return. Other youth leave to find work. While those who are highly educated are most likely to leave rural communities they are also more likely to move to rural areas from an urban setting – i.e. highly educated individuals tend to be the most mobile. However, since those with a university-level education comprise only a fraction of any youth cohort, their mobility has little effect on the overall patterns of rural-urban difference.

Additional research is needed on variation by sub-groups, in-migration to rather than out-migration from rural communities, the effects of incorporation of rural areas into urban metropolitan boundaries, the effects of information technology and distance education on the educational options available to rural youth, types (as opposed to levels) of education pursued by

rural versus urban youth, and the effects of rural economic development on opportunities for local youth. Further, it is important to have systematic evaluation of those initiatives in rural areas that target youth to ensure that successful policies are identified.

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Foreword

This document is part of a short research paper series developed in 2001, and commissioned by the Applied Research Branch of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). The series focuses on various elements of Canadian youths' experience of school-work transitions. It was developed to add to ongoing discussions surrounding HRDC's youth research strategy.

1. Introduction

This paper will provide an overview of the relevant research literature on rural and urban youth, focusing on the challenges they face – in human capital development, in access to quality education and on the impact of their skills and education on their transitions to the labour market. The paper will draw on Canadian material published in English, but will also include material from other countries (especially the United States, Britain and Australia).

The structure of the paper will be first to provide a brief overview of the key differences between rural and urban youth. Then there will be more focused discussion of educational aspirations and attainments, schooling, employment options and outcomes, and migration patterns. Youth migration out of rural communities is an issue for policy makers as well as those in rural communities. As will be shown below, decisions about migration are closely linked to issues of post-secondary schooling and employment. The final sections of the paper will present an overview of challenges facing rural youth, general research issues and suggestions for policy-relevant research, based on what is currently known, and the gaps identified in the review of the literature.

1.1 Definitions of rural

It is important to keep in mind that there is no general agreement on what constitutes a “rural” area. As du Plessis et al. (2000) show there are a number of important differences in the way that “rural” is defined, both conceptually and operationally, in official statistics reported by Statistics Canada. The census uses measures of population size and density, based on information on municipalities, small unincorporated communities and enumeration areas. Depending on the type of analysis, and depending on the unit being classified (at the enumeration level, the census subdivision, census consolidated subdivision or census division level), more or less of the population will be classified as “rural.” “Rural and Small Town” analyses (see Bollman, 1992) emphasize distance from a large urban centre. There are other variations used by those calculating similar statistics in other jurisdictions. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) classifies regions in terms of the percentage of the population who live in rural (low density) communities. Non-governmental researchers

often bring in other criteria, such as the predominance of agriculture or other extractive industries, as well as more subjective and social definitions.

The importance of definitions becomes evident when one compares results across analyses, in overviews such as this. Different definitions of rurality lead to quite different people being classified as rural or non-rural (Crockett et al., 2000; du Plessis et al., 2000), so the correlates of rurality will shift with the definition. This fact should be kept in mind as analyses from quite different sources, using quite different definitions of rurality are presented in the overview below.

1.2 Diversity of rural areas

Even when using a consistent definition of what constitutes a rural area, it is important to recognise that rural areas within a given country, and certainly across different countries are quite diverse. The OECD (1993) identifies three types of rural areas – peripheral or remote rural areas, intermediate areas, and those which are adjacent to larger urban centres (and therefore more integrated with the urban economy). Crockett et al. (2000) highlight the importance of recognising other types of diversity among rural communities and rural youth. “Although rural communities may share important characteristics that distinguish them from metropolitan communities, they also differ from each other along such potentially important dimensions as geographic region, ethnic composition, occupational structure, and access to major cities.” (p. 45). Bollman (1999b) and Bollman and Beshiri (2000) note the variation in employment rates, employment growth, and migration patterns in rural areas, depending on the region of the country and the level of dependence on agriculture. Given this diversity it is, as Crockett et al. (2000) comment, difficult to make accurate generalizations about “rural youth” as a category. See also DeYoung (1994) and Rugg and Jones (1999) for related discussions of the diversity issues as they affect research on rural youth.

One subgroup of rural youth that warrants separate mention is aboriginal youth. As the OECD (1993) report notes, some rural areas host a concentration of aboriginal peoples (and/or those from other cultural or linguistic minorities). The issues facing these communities are often intricately linked with concerns about maintaining cultural and linguistic integrity and promoting self-government. In Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) addresses

some of these issues (see also Siggner, 1992). It is clear that for these culturally separate groups it is very difficult to import or impose policies developed for other rural areas and expect them to work well if the issue of cultural diversity is not addressed. (For example, see Dehyle, 1992).

1.3 Key rural-urban differences

Keeping the above caveats about broad generalizations in mind, there are some fairly consistent differences between rural and urban areas (and between rural and urban youth) that warrant note. While the rural-urban gap is decreasing, at least in some areas there is a difference in terms of levels of education. Canadian census data shows that rural residents (of all ages, including those between 15 and 24 years of age) are more likely to leave school without obtaining a high school certificate (Bollman, 1999a; Bollman and Biggs, 1992; Fellegi, 1996; Statistics Canada, 1995). Rural residents (and rural youth) are less likely to obtain a university degree (Bollman, 1999a). Indeed Fellegi (1996, p. 8) reports that "At every age, rural residents are half as likely to have a university degree than their urban counterparts." As Bollman (1999a, p. 8) notes, overall "the more rural the community, the lower the level of educational attainment in the community" – with considerable diversity within and between provinces.

In terms of employment statistics, the same data show rural-urban differences in employment patterns. Again with considerable variation across regions and sub-regions (Fellegi, 1996), labour force participation rates were lower in rural areas of Canada (Bollman and Biggs, 1992; Statistics Canada, 1995), and unemployment rates (particularly among youth) were higher (Bollman and Biggs, 1992; Dupuy et al., 2000a, 2000b; Statistics Canada, 1995). Also, in at least some rural areas, bouts of unemployment last longer than in urban areas (Crockett et al., 2000). Certain types of rural areas seem to be particularly hard hit – especially those with a concentration of primary sector employment and traditional manufacturing employment (Bollman, 1999b). However, there is little evidence that rurality itself is a constraint on employment growth (Fellegi, 1996). What is more, while rural family incomes are lower than urban (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000; Fellegi, 1996; Vera-Toscano et al., 2001), taking into account family size and costs of living, fewer rural than urban families fall below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off. Further, the incidence of low income families in rural areas is on a downward trend, while that for urban families has been increasing since the early 1990s. (Fellegi, 1996).

Overall, as of 1996, about 22% to 31% of the Canadian population lived in rural areas, depending on the definition of “rural” used (duPlessis et al., 2000), and the rural and small town population grew in the 1990s (Mendelson and Bollman, 1998). However, since urban areas are also growing, and at a faster rate, the proportion of the Canadian population living in rural areas is declining (Fellegi, 1996). Much of the growth in “rural” areas consists of growth in retirement-destination communities, and even moreso in the commuting zones near urban centres (Mendelson and Bollman, 1998). In fact some of the growth in urban areas is attributable to the fact that, in many areas, rural communities and small towns have been reclassified so that they fall inside the boundaries of amalgamated metropolitan regional municipalities. It remains to be seen how this shift in municipal boundaries will affect the educational and employment options facing youth in the formerly rural communities at the fringes of these expanded urban areas.

One recurring pattern in a number of the research reports is a tendency to emphasize the negative aspects of life in rural areas – to focus on the problems. Part of this pattern reflects the fact that some of the research is problem driven – whether it is a matter of looking at farm closures (Conger et al., 1994), at risk youth (Furlong et al., 1997; Sherman, 1992; Vissing, 1999), or economic stagnation more generally (McGranahan and Ghelf, 1991). Part of it may also reflect the primarily economic measures of “well-being” that are used. There may be disadvantages or challenges facing many rural youth, such as limited training opportunities, small firms with few managerial positions (Rugg and Jones, 1999), lack of access to resources and services (OECD, 1993), vulnerability to rapid economic change (OECD, 1993), limited access to appropriate housing (Jones, 2001; Rowntree, 1994; Rugg and Jones, 1999) and transportation (Rowntree, 1994; Rugg and Jones, 1999). Rural youth see themselves as having particular needs and concerns (Caputo, 2000; Looker, 1993). Rural communities express considerable concern about the out-migration of many of their “best and brightest” youth (Fellegi, 1996).

Nevertheless, despite these “problems” facing rural youth, many have very close ties to their communities (Jamieson, 2000; Looker, 1993) and would choose to stay (Wilson and Peterson, 1988). As Rugg and Jones (1999, p. 35) note: “Policy makers cannot make blanket assumptions about young people’s unwillingness to stay in the countryside.” Indeed the challenge for researchers may be to recognise the positive aspects of rural life that are quite evident to the young people who live there (Looker, 1993; Wyn and Stokes, 2000; Wyn et al., 1998). Newton

(1993) presents a summary of some of the advantages and disadvantages of rural communities in general and rural schools in particular – noting the importance of recognising the positive as well as the negative components of rural life. The 1993 OECD report (p.30) echoes this sentiment when it states:

Socially and culturally, rural areas are perceived as offering their residents many special benefits including a more cohesive community life, less crime and congestion, and better access to natural recreation. Many rural areas host rich, sometimes ancient cultural and artisanal traditions that cannot be transferred or recreated elsewhere.

Having presented this brief overview, the remainder of this paper will look in more detail at the educational and employment experiences of rural youth. As Crockett et al. (2000, p. 45) note, it is important to study rural youth in and of their own right. Such an examination can also “provide insight into the sources of resilience among rural youth that may apply to other settings.”

2. Educational plans and attainments

As was indicated in the overview presented above, rural students tend, as a whole, to have somewhat lower educational aspirations and attainments than their urban counterparts. In this section the paper will explore that pattern in more detail.

2.1 Educational plans

As many researchers have documented, it is important to consider educational plans and aspirations as well as attainments, since many rural students (and their parents) do not see formal education as relevant to their career success. It is not so much that these students are unable to complete high school and/or to pursue post-secondary education, as it is that they select themselves out of these academic pursuits. Given this fact, it is important to understand why so many rural students, including many with the academic ability to go further, fail to include further schooling as part of their plans.¹

Some of the rationale for the lower aspirations among rural youth reflects limitations in some (particularly some *small*) rural high schools. These will be discussed in more detail below. For now it is important to note that many rural schools are unable to offer the range of courses that larger, better resourced schools can provide (Broomhall, 1993). This means that students with special needs and/or those who would benefit from advanced classes find their school experience less satisfying than they might otherwise. There is some evidence that teachers in rural schools place less emphasis on higher education than teachers in urban settings (Crockett et al., 2000). On the other side of this picture is Corbett's analysis (2000a, 2000b) which suggests that teachers in rural settings *do* emphasize higher education, particularly for young women (who do better in school than their male peers) – and in so doing encourage an out-migration of youth that has serious repercussions for rural communities.

However, not all of the “blame” for students' educational aspirations can be laid at the feet of teachers. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that parents have much more influence on the plans and expectations of young people than either teachers or school counsellors (Looker, 1994;

¹ See Looker and Lowe (2001) for a comprehensive overview of factors affecting students' plans and access to post-secondary education, particularly the role of financing on these decisions.

Looker and Lowe, 2001). Looker and MacKinnon (1999) document that parents of rural youth have lower educational aspirations for their children than do parents in more urban areas. To some extent this reflects the lower educational attainments of the parents themselves. Blackwell and McLaughlin (1999) examine the effects of parental background on youth aspirations and find that this background does have an effect on rural youth, particularly young rural women.

2.2 Educational attainment

There are two main aspects to the statement that rural students have lower levels of educational attainment. The first is the fact that rural students (particularly rural males) are more likely than urban students to “drop out” before completing high school (Fellegi, 1996). Secondly, rural students are less likely than urban students to obtain a university degree (Ibid.). These two aspects will be considered in turn.

There is a separate body of literature on school dropouts that will not be examined here. That literature looks at both correlates of dropping out, and programs designed to encourage students to “stay in school.” Little of that literature explicitly focuses on rural-urban differences.

Thiessen and Looker (1999) show the rates of high school dropouts for certain rural Nova Scotia school boards, as well as for the province as a whole. It is clear that “the risk of leaving school is highest in grade 10” (p. 16). While this may reflect the fact that this is the stage at which most students reach the age when they are legally entitled to leave school, it also suggests that some of the students may also be dealing poorly with the stresses created by the transition from junior to senior high school. The same data show that young males are substantially more likely than females to drop out – at every grade level. (See also Lamb, 1994; Population Health Research Unit, 2000; Wyn and Lamb, 1996). DeYoung (1994) not only documents that rural students are more at risk of dropping out of high school (and are less likely than urban students to later return), he also attempts to identify some of the contributing factors. Part of his analysis focuses on the limitations of rural schools (discussed below). He also sees the high levels of poverty in many rural areas as contributing to this withdrawal.

Conger et al. (1994) and the Population Research Health Unit (2000) argue that the paid work undertaken by rural youth is often used to contribute to the family income. These researchers see

this as an asset, as a recognition of the young person contributing as an adult would, despite the fact that it can draw the youth out of school. Similarly Corbett (2000a, 2000b) shows the importance of paid work in the fishery as a drawing card, particularly for young men. In that sphere they are treated as adults, and their informal but very real multi-faceted skills and abilities are recognised in a way that contrasts dramatically with the negative feedback they often obtain from teachers. These researchers argue that economic pressures can pull rural students (especially rural males) out of the classroom. There may be short-term benefits that accrue to the individual and his/her family, but there are also long-term costs as the young person faces an employment market that more and more requires educational credentials.

DeYoung (1994) also talks about the risks associated with children coming from dysfunctional families. To the extent that the economic conditions facing many rural households create stress, this stress certainly would be felt by the children as well as the parents. Rural communities have fewer of the formal support services available in urban areas. Reliance on the informal support that many see as an asset of small rural communities may be compromised if many families in a community are experiencing stress due to economic downturns. There may also be a reluctance to turn to these informal support networks if the stresses lead to dysfunctional behaviour on the part of parents (alcoholism, physical abuse, etc.). Rural schools (and rural communities) are not likely to have the range of support services to offer these at risk children (Crockett et al., 2000). As Israel et al. (2001) observe, social supports, in the form of family and/or community social capital, can have an important positive effect on rural students and the likelihood of their completing high school.

Crockett et al. (2000) also note that the homogeneity in many rural communities and schools can lead to an intolerance of difference, so that students who see themselves as different in some way experience additional pressures, without the traditional support networks. Students facing these various pressures are at risk of dropping out of high school prior to completion.

The second aspect of educational attainment that has received some attention in the literature on rural-urban differences focuses on post-secondary education. Several researchers document that fewer rural than urban youth attend post-secondary institutions, and fewer rural students successfully complete a degree program (Anisef et al., 2000; Butlin, 1999; Bollman, 1992;

DeYoung, 1994; Gibbs et al., 1998; James et al., 1999; Looker and Lowe, 2001; University of Alberta, 2000). "For instance, of all individuals aged 25-29 living in rural areas, 31% had a post-secondary education in 1996, compared to 46% of those living in urban areas." (Dupuy et al., 2000a: 3). If one looks at the age group 15-29, 17% of rural and 27% of urban youth have some post-secondary education; 5% of rural youth versus 12% of urban have a university degree (Ibid., p. 128). Butlin (1999) presents data from the 1995 School Leavers Follow-up Survey showing that 45% of urban versus 34% of rural respondents had attended university four years after high school. Rural youth were more likely to attend college or a CEGEP (33% versus 28%) or to report no post-secondary education (26% versus 21%). Seven percent of both rural and urban respondents to this survey attended a trade or vocational school. So, the overall picture is clear – rural youth tend to get less post-secondary education and to pursue different types of post-secondary education than urban youth. The question is *why* this should be the case.

Some of the difference has been attributed to the lower socio-economic backgrounds of the rural students' parents (Anisef et al., 2000; DeYoung, 1994). Parents with lower levels of education themselves often see little need for post-secondary education. Another factor contributing to the lower levels of education for rural youth, as Dupuy et al. (2000a, p. 4) note, is "that the type of jobs available in rural areas may require lower skills than those required by jobs in urban areas." Bollman (1999b, p. 8) makes a similar point:

One reason for a lower attainment of higher education in rural regions is a (perceived and perhaps real) lower demand for workers with higher education in rural areas. There is consequently a (perceived and perhaps real) lower pay-off to higher education in rural regions.

Further, the lower levels of family income in rural areas have an effect. The high cost of attending a post-secondary institution is a deterrent for many youth (Looker, 1997), particularly those from low income families. To the extent that rural families have lower incomes (Fellegi, 1996) the high costs associated with further education would be more of a deterrent to rural youth. What is more, unlike most urban students, most rural youth have to leave their home community to pursue post-secondary education (Jones, 1992; Looker, 1993; MacKinnon and Looker, 1998). This complicates the decision process, especially given the close ties many rural youth have with their home community (Looker, 1993), and it also creates additional costs. Many urban youth reduce the cost of attending post-secondary education by living at home with

their parents. Rural youth rarely have this option unless they happen to live within commuting distance of a post-secondary institution (McGranahan, 1991). What is more, since many rural youth have to leave their home community to pursue post-secondary education, as Dupuy et al. (2000a, p. 4) note: individuals originating from rural areas must have left their community *and* returned to it to be counted as a rural resident with post-secondary education. The fact that only a fraction of leavers return to their rural community ... implies that the proportion of youth with post-secondary education will be lower in rural areas" – lower than the proportion of youth who originate from rural areas who obtain some post-secondary education. In other words, cross-sectional data underestimates the number and the proportion of rural youth who pursue higher education.

Broomhall and Johnson (1994, p. 566) argue that family background is not "such an impediment to improved educational performance as generally believed." They make this case, based on the fact that parental education and socio-economic status have little direct effect on their child's educational outcomes, when one controls on educational values held by the parent and child, local employment options, and the youth's willingness to move. See also Looker and Lowe (2001) for a detailed discussion of the effects of financing on student access to, adjustment to and completion of post-secondary education.

Andres and Looker (2001) show that the structure of post-secondary education can affect the participation rates of rural youth. British Columbia has a formal system of articulation between community colleges and universities. This system allows students to complete the first two years of their university program at a community college, and then transfer to a university for the last part of their program. Nova Scotia has no such formal system; rather, transfers are negotiated on a case by case basis. A comparison of rural students in the two regions showed that while N.S. rural youth were less likely than B.C. youth to attend a post-secondary program, they were more likely to complete a program they had started. In other words, the articulated program seemed to increase access, but in a way that did not necessarily lead to degree completion. Andres (in press) has explored various barriers to completion, focusing particularly on the transfer process.

There is also the issue of student adjustment to post-secondary education. As we have seen, rural students often have to leave their home community to pursue further education. In many cases

this means they are simultaneously leaving their parents' home (often for the first time), leaving their community and friends, and adjusting to life in a large urban setting. As Looker and Dwyer (1998) note, the move to a large city, with its anonymity and complexity, can be a daunting experience. Rural youth are often unfamiliar with public transportation systems (since public transportation is quite limited in many rural areas). They have little experience finding housing in a large, complex setting, and have to develop a whole new set of skills – often without the aid of the support network on which they have traditionally depended. Shaffer and Seyfrit (2000) provide additional examples of the challenges facing rural youth in an urban educational setting. While some post-secondary institutions recognise this problem and set up venues where students originating from the same rural area can meet, such initiatives are rare. Sharpe (1996) presents similar data from students in Newfoundland. He found that rural students faced various problems adjusting to their post-secondary experiences in an urban setting. One problem that ties in with the issue of challenges facing rural schools (discussed below) is the fact that many of the rural students felt that their high school did not adequately prepare them for university. This included students who would have liked to have additional, different courses. It also included those who felt the level of instruction they received, particularly in mathematics, put them at a disadvantage.

2.3 Gender

As is evident from the discussion above, there are some important gender differences with respect to educational plans and attainments. Given the persistence of these differences, it is useful to highlight them in some way.

On the one hand, it is clear that females are advantaged in various ways by the school system. They do better in school – they get higher grades, fail fewer courses, are more likely to take honours and advanced level classes (Looker, 1993). They are less likely than males to drop out of school (Thiessen and Looker, 1999). Female students report liking school better (Looker, 1993). They are seen as better and more compliant students by teachers (Corbett, 2000b). They also have higher educational aspirations than their male counterparts (Looker, 1997).

However, there are other gender differences that affect both the educational and occupational outcomes of youth, particularly in rural areas. One is the impact of relationships on their

educational and occupational decisions. As MacKinnon and Looker (1997) document in their analysis of rural youth, young women are much more likely to expect relationships to affect their educational decisions. Further, talking with them when they are in their early twenties, it appears that more of the young women than the young men had in fact interrupted or decided to forego post-secondary education because of the demands of interpersonal relationships.

Wilson et al. (1993) look at the factors which affect the educational decision of young women in one rural area, and find that traditional attitudes towards gender roles were important to these decisions. Women tend to marry and have children at a younger age than men, and rural women marry and have children earlier than their urban counterparts (Crockett et al., 2000; Looker, 1993). Marriage and/or child bearing often create barriers for young women's plans for advanced education. These barriers are exacerbated by the lack of access to day care facilities that typifies many rural areas. Part-time studies are an option for some, but the feasibility of this option depends on the availability of flexible institutional structures. Without access to courses which they can fit around their family responsibilities, these women find it difficult to complete their post-secondary programs. Marriage and/or a marriage-like relationship also inhibits the geographic mobility required of many rural youth if they are to pursue post-secondary education. But Findeis (1995) sees this lack of mobility of rural women as a potential asset for rural communities. These young women have stayed not because they did not have the academic ability to leave, but rather because their family responsibilities kept them close to home. They are an often untapped source of human capital in rural communities.

We saw earlier that cost is very much a factor in constraining the participation of rural youth in post-secondary education (Looker, 1997; Looker and Lowe, 2001; Sharpe, 1996). Other evidence suggests that young women in rural areas have a more difficult time accessing paid employment (Crockett et al., 2000). Such paid employment is often essential to rural youth being able to afford to further their education beyond high school.

Given these constraints on rural women, it is perhaps not surprising that, despite their higher aspirations and their strong academic performance, there are few, if any, gender differences when one looks at the rates of completion of post-secondary programs (Looker and Dwyer,

1998). Nevertheless, women and men continue to pursue different fields of study and they face quite different returns to their educational investments (Looker and Lowe, 2001).

2.4 Summary

The evidence has shown that, overall, rural youth have lower educational aspirations. Researchers have suggested that this reflects their lower socio-economic background and/or the pull of local employment (especially for males). Teachers and parents both seem to reinforce these lower aspirations, in different ways.

In terms of outcomes, rural students have higher rates than urban students of withdrawing from school (“dropping out”) before completing a high school certificate. This pattern particularly holds for young males. Rural poverty seems to play a role in this, as do the stresses often associated with low income (and so this pattern may not hold in economically vibrant rural areas).

Rural youth are less likely to attend and to complete a post-secondary program of study, especially university. Both cost factors and factors relating to the adjustment to the move from their home community seem to affect rural students’ access and adjustment to post-secondary studies.

Educational plans and attainments are very gendered processes. Young women, in rural as in urban areas, perform better in school – but they face barriers in access to post-secondary education. These barriers are often exacerbated if the young woman is from a rural area, requiring her to move and to sever various interpersonal ties. The early age of marriage and of child bearing among rural women is relevant here. Young males, especially young rural males, have higher drop out rates in high school – cutting off many educational options in their future.

3. Schools

3.1 Rural schools

We have seen that, in general, rural youth tend to have lower educational aspirations and lower levels of educational attainment than urban youth. A critical question for policy makers is the extent to which this pattern reflects characteristics of rural schools, rather than factors in the students' home life (which may be less amenable to policy interventions). Some of the research literature helps us address that question.

There is considerable research on rural schools and rural educators. Indeed, the year 2001 marks the sixth in which the National Conference on Rural Education has been held in Saskatoon. At that conference educational practitioners and policy makers mix with academic researchers who study rural education and discuss ways in which the quality of education can be improved in rural schools in Canada. Only some of the information presented at those conferences makes its way into the more public domain in the form of published work. Nevertheless, the sharing of information and experiences – and the testing of academic ideas against the standard of experience – provides an opportunity for better informed policy and practice. There is also an American-based journal dedicated to rural educators – for sharing information about effective practices, and about programs that failed. Other research, undertaken by educational and other researchers (particularly sociologists and psychologists), is reported on in other research journals or in edited books on the topic.

Many studies of rural youth show that there are some limitations to the curricular and support services offered in rural as compared to urban schools. As documented by the 1993 Small Rural High School Task Force, based in Nova Scotia, many rural schools have limited course offerings, especially in honours-level courses and/or special courses for gifted or for academically challenged students (see also DeYoung, 1994). Looker (1993) notes that rural students were twice as likely (60% versus 30%) to agree that “there are not enough course options at my school.” Given the lower tax base of most rural communities, there are limits to the support services they can fund as well (DeYoung, 1994; Newton, 1993; Small Rural High School Task Force, 1993). It is often the case that economies of scale can be achieved only by school amalgamations, creating large catchment areas and necessitating prolonged bus rides for

many if not most students. Such amalgamations are politically controversial and have an impact on a number of rural communities, especially since the school is often an important focus of activities for local youth (Chan and Elder, 2001).

Teachers in rural schools may also be less experienced, less well-trained and have higher turnover rates than those in urban settings (DeYoung, 1994). Corbett (2000a, 2000b) provides a detailed examination of the role of one rural school in a small Nova Scotia fishing community. He finds that teachers, many of whom are from urban areas and most of whom are "from away," tend to devalue local employment, encouraging any student with apparent academic potential to leave and pursue higher education. In other words they are complicit in students, especially young women "learning to leave." Ironically if they are successful, such out-migration can lead to accelerated school closings (Hay and Basran, 1992). DeYoung (1994) makes a related argument noting the emphasis on individualism in modern schooling undercuts the importance of place and kinship that are so central to many rural communities. Newton (1993) summarizes many of the advantages and disadvantages of small rural schools. The disadvantages tend to focus on cost-related issues and issues of teacher and administrator isolation, although there is also mention of the lack of exposure to and corresponding intolerance of difference in many small rural schools (and communities).

Despite the very real disadvantages they create, rural schools, particularly small rural schools, also have some distinct advantages. Certainly they tend to be highly regarded by parents and students (Small Rural High School Task Force, 1993). Rural parents are pleased with "the quality available to their children in their existing schools." (p. 32). They feel that:

students received an excellent academic education ... [and that] ... school experiences enhanced self-esteem and that small size and teachers' familiarity with students produced high student morale and contributed significantly to a low drop out rate when compared to other schools in Nova Scotia (p. 32).

Ballou and Podgursky (1998) report that, while rural schools tend to be poorer in terms of resources, they also function more effectively than urban schools, possibly because they are smaller and more integrated with their community. Crockett et al. (2000) highlight other advantages of rural schools. They note that rural students tend to have higher levels of participation in extra curricular activities and they have stronger, supportive relations with their

peers. Looker and MacKinnon (1999) document that rural parents are more likely than urban parents to have contact with their child's school, and to see school officials as approachable. This type of contact, with both parents and students, is an asset also noted by Newton (1993). Teachers know their students in small schools – and know the parents as well. This sort of social capital can enhance the learning experience for rural students, as well as serving as a type of informal social control on disruptive behaviour. In general, the rural school is more integrated into the community than is often the case in urban settings. Students in small schools have a greater opportunity for taking on leadership roles (Ibid.). DeYoung (1994, p. 249) argues that schools are "... not the cause of economic decline in rural places. Rather, they are the institutions that have to live and work with the consequences of such decline."

Given the dominance of technology, particularly "information technology," in the public sphere, it is not surprising that at least some researchers have examined the role that such technology can and does play for students in rural areas. Fellegi (1996, p. 8) notes that "Although rural areas are behind in education levels, there is a strong base of computer literacy in rural areas upon which one might build rural development initiatives." This analysis looks at the proportion of rural and urban youth who report being able to use a computer – in the 15 to 19-year-old age group, over 80% of both rural and urban youth report this ability. In the 20 to 24 age group, the proportions are about 70% for rural youth and about 80% for urban. Rural and urban areas both had considerable numbers of youth who had taken computer-related courses, but slightly more urban than rural youth reported this, especially in the older age group (67% of 15 to 19- year-olds in both rural and urban areas had taken a course; 62% of rural and 67% of urban youth aged 20 to 24 reported this) (Fellegi, 1996, p. 9). Ten percent of both rural and urban youth aged 15-19 report using on-line services. For older youth, there is an urban-rural difference – 18% versus 8% of rural youth have used this facility. Slightly fewer rural youth also report having access to computers in their home – for 15 to 19-year-olds, the proportions are 35% of rural and 52% of urban youth; for 20-24 year olds the figures are 21% rural, 45% urban.

Between 1986 and 1995, the share of households owning a computer increased in urban and rural areas. However, the increase was considerably larger in urban areas. Rural areas are falling behind in terms of the share of households with computers." (Ibid., p. 9).

The 1993 OECD report sees technology as providing a potential not only for rural schools, but also for rural communities more generally. The Nova Scotia Small Rural High School Task Force presents a similar argument. It sees distance-education technology as a way for school boards to provide certain courses if the school is too small to establish economically viable class sizes or if the teacher expertise is not available. Bosetti and Gee (1993) and Downer and Downer (1993) evaluate two different programs which involved Canadian schools using distance education in this way for rural students. While there are suggestions for improvements, both sets of researchers conclude that there is real potential for distance education in rural Canada.

Hyman et al. (1995) point out the potential disadvantages of technology for rural communities, while offering a framework for ways in which technology can be used to create and support sustainable rural communities and schools. The disadvantages include rural schools having less access to the technology and technology support, given their lower tax base; the concentration of applications and expertise in urban areas, and the corresponding shift of services away from rural communities. Further,

...new technologies, especially in the telecommunications field, often pose threats to the sense of community. If technology allows people to transcend the limitations of distance and time, it will make them less dependent on the people, the land and the seasons right outside their door." (p. 103).

These authors warn that this type of shift can lead to rural residents being less sensitive to and less protective of their environment, making the land more susceptible to exploitation by outside interests. Nevertheless, to the extent that information technology provides the opportunity for broader education, regardless of location, "Not only can we develop systems for equivalent education for young people, we can also meet the challenges of continually educating adults and workers" (p. 98). As these authors note, a comprehensive, well co-ordinated job-training policy relating to new technology can minimize the jobs lost to rural areas, while optimising the human capital available for new jobs created by shifts in technology.

Marshall (1993) proposes another way that isolated rural schools can overcome some of their limitations. He describes a program in which several small, rural schools, spread out over a large geographic region, were able to share a variety of services (educational consulting services, conference services, financial and business services). While noting the ongoing challenges that

such an undertaking faces, there is evidence that such sharing programs have potential in rural areas.

3.2 Summary

Many of the challenges facing rural schools seem to be based on either their small size or the fragility of their economic base. Their fate is often closely tied to the economic viability of the rural community in which they are based. To the extent that economic development policies are able to increase the sustainability of various rural communities in Canada, these policies will also be increasing the likelihood that schools in those areas will be able to offer high quality education to their students.

School size is a hotly debated issue – one in which economies of scale are pitted against the importance of integration with the community and concerns about the potentially negative implications of bussing students over long distances. There is little agreement about which side of this debate has the most persuasive arguments. Certainly rural communities fight long and hard to keep their small local schools. One aspect of rural schooling on which there does seem to be agreement is the need for increased support services. Given their limited tax base, rural schools (particularly small rural ones) often find it difficult to maintain student services at the level common in more solidly-funded urban schools. Such services include counselling in its various forms –academic and career counselling as well as assistance with personal problems and concerns. They also include supports for students with special needs, whether academic, physical or psychological. These non-teaching positions are often those first sacrificed when funding cuts are transferred from the provinces to the local school boards. The challenge for policy makers, then, is to find a way to provide these services for students in rural areas so they are not disadvantaged relative to their urban counterparts.

Distance education offers one possible solution to the challenge of providing a full range of courses for a diverse student body in rural areas. Other ways of enhancing the experience of students and teachers are also being explored in different school areas. Sharing non-teaching services can help overcome the cost burden to individual school boards. Policies that ensure that rural schools attract and keep highly qualified, experienced teachers will obviously benefit rural schools – keeping in mind the caveat that these teachers “from away” may inadvertently

undermine some community values that are important supports for rural students and their families.

One challenge is to ensure that innovations are evaluated in a way that will help inform other schools facing the same pressures. School boards stressed for monies to fund teaching are not likely to be able to justify spending their limited funds on evaluation research. Without external sources of funding, or external provision of such evaluations, successful programs will go undocumented and there will be limited opportunity for one school board to learn from the pitfalls experienced by another.

Finally, it is important to document and emphasize those things which rural schools do well. As some researchers note, they are often *more* effective than urban schools (particularly large urban schools), because of their integration with the community. Teachers and school officials know the students and their families and provide important supports and “social capital” for students.

4. Employment

4.1 Employment and rural youth

As noted in the introduction, employment opportunities are often limited for rural youth. As a result, rural youth in Canada have consistently higher unemployment rates than urban youth (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000; Surendra, 1991; Thiessen and Looker, 1999). Dupuy et al. (2000b) report an unemployment rate for 15 to 29-year-olds who are not full-time students in 1996, as 16.8% in rural areas, compared to 11.9% in urban areas.

Not only is the percentage of persons having a job lower in rural areas ... the full year, full-time employment rate of youths was 39.0% in rural areas compared with 48.8% in urban areas. This rural rate was lowest in Newfoundland (21.7%) and highest in Ontario (44.6%). (Ibid., 61).

These employment differences are particularly strong for those aged 20 to 29 (Dupuy et al., 2000a, p. 5). Cunningham and Bollman (1997) note that Canada has one of the highest rural unemployment rates among OECD countries.

Not only are unemployment rates higher, labour force participation rates are lower in rural areas (Bollman, 1992; Thiessen and Looker, 1999), further testament to the paucity of employment opportunities. Phimister et al. (no date) examine the particularly low levels of labour force participation by rural females. They find that these rates cannot be attributed to the family responsibilities undertaken by these young women, nor by their levels of human capital. Rather it seems that there are few job opportunities.

Vera-Toscano et al. (2001) report gender differences as well as rural-urban differences, using data from the 1994 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. They find a consistent rural-urban difference in the percentage of men (66% rural, 73% urban) and women (62% rural, 72% urban) who were employed all year. More women than men and more rural than urban women (7% of rural women versus 4% of urban women compared to 2% of rural and urban men) were *out* of the labour force all year. More men than women and more urban than rural individuals were self-employed. The relevant percentages are: rural males, 14%; urban males, 7%; rural females, 9%; urban females, 5%. (Table 9, p. 40).

Killian and Beaulieu (1995) echo these analyses by expressing concern about the failure to create jobs in rural areas. There has, of course, been considerable attention given to the issue of how best to create jobs in rural areas – in Canada and elsewhere. There is currently a major research project, based at Concordia University in Montreal, looking at the “New Rural Economy” which focuses on ways that rural communities can develop sustainable economic options without seriously compromising those parts of their nature they see as important. (See <http://nre.concordia.ca>).

The authors of the 1993 OECD report identify some basic trends that help explain the paucity of economic opportunities in rural areas. They note that:

rural economies are narrowly based and therefore exceptionally vulnerable to rapid changes in economic structures – and economic structures are changing rapidly in the modern global economy. Rural communities are too small to be as diverse as larger places, where changes in the various sectors are often off-setting or occur at different intervals. (p. 26).

A Canadian representative at the OECD meeting that produced this report is quoted as saying “Rural regions have been severely buffeted by technological changes, by world-wide economic restructuring, by volatility of domestic and international product cycles and by changing life-styles and demographic pressures.” (p. 27). Other changes that are noted include labour displacement due to a shift away from primary industries without corresponding growth in other areas; lack of skills and information in rural communities to enable full participation in the new and developing economic spheres; lack of economies of scale that would allow rural communities to access public, consumer and business services; and decline in regulatory measures and rural subsidies.

Fellegi (1996, p. 12) comments on the ways in which type of employment varies by rural/urban location:

The share of employment allocated to distributive services, personal services and social services is almost identical across urban and rural areas except rural areas have a much smaller share of their employment in producer services which means that they receive very little leverage from high growth rates in the producer services sector.

Rural workers who are not full-time students are more likely to be in blue collar jobs (48% versus 36% in urban areas); they are less likely to be in professional/managerial occupations

(22% rural versus 30% urban) (Dupuy et al., 2000a. Appendix Table 5, p. 144). Rural jobs are more likely to be in agriculture, fishing and trapping (9% compared to 1% in urban areas), in forestry and mining (4% versus 1% urban); they are less likely to be in the service sector, overall (65% in rural, 79% in urban) (Ibid., Appendix Table 6, p. 145).

Rural employees are more likely to be working in small organizations. A third (33%) of rural males (45% of rural females) were employed at workplaces which had fewer than 20 employees. The corresponding figures for urban employees who work in small enterprises are 22% for men and 30% for women. Alternatively, urban employees were more likely to be in workplaces with more than 100 employees; 7% of rural males and 3% of rural females, compared to 12% of urban males and 9% of urban females, work in these establishments (Vera-Toscano et al., 2001, pp. 27 and 44). These figures are consistent with those reported by Fellegi (1996, p. 12) who notes that "rural areas are intensive in the small business sector." Further, the

...growth of employment in the rural small business sector matched the growth in employment in urban small businesses. [But] the rate of job losses among larger businesses in rural areas is one half the rate of job losses among larger businesses in urban areas. (p. 12).

Overall, "rural areas experience lower employment growth, in part because the fastest growing sector, the business services sector, is largely concentrated in metropolitan centres." (Bollman, 1999a: p. 4).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the wealth of material dealing with rural development policies. Here, it is sufficient to note that the broader issues dealing with rural development are, of course, relevant to any discussion of rural youth. The question is how the economic restrictions facing rural communities have an impact specifically on rural youth.

Looker (1993) shows that rural youth themselves see their options as relatively limited. They describe urban areas as places where there is "more" – more jobs, more opportunities, more options (but also more crime, more problems, more trouble). Rural youth, facing less diversity than urban youth, seem to be aware of fewer occupations as options for their future. Given their perceptions of limited employment options in the local area, many rural youth opt to leave their home community. See Kennedy (1998) for an overview of some of the American literature on

employment and migration. The issue of youth migration from rural areas will be explored in more detail in the next section of this paper.

Several researchers (Andres et al., 1999; Anisef et al., 2000; Crockett et al., 2000) document the fact that rural youth have lower occupational aspirations than urban youth. By this they mean that rural youth are less likely to aspire to enter professional and managerial positions. Rural youth tend to be concentrated in the service sector (Bollman, 1992). They also tend to have lower wages than urban youth (Vera-Toscano et al., 2001) and to start paid employment later. They are less likely to obtain full time, full year work and less likely to have access to paid summer work when they are students (Looker, 1993; Looker and Dwyer, 1998; Vera-Toscano et al., 2001). DeYoung (1994) notes the higher levels of poverty in rural areas, and the impact of this poverty in creating stress for rural youth. The same study shows that bouts of unemployment tend to be longer in rural than in urban areas, and rural workers are more likely to take cuts to their pay scales and/or benefits packages when they return to work.

Given the relatively low levels of rural family income (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000) it is perhaps not surprising that more than one researcher has looked at the ways in which family income has an impact on rural youth and their employment. Vera-Toscano et al. (2000:25) report that rural and small-town incomes have been below those for urban areas for three decades. In the 1993-94 period, rural incomes were about 80% of those in urban areas. What is more, rural families are more likely than urban families to have persistently low incomes. Women in rural areas earn less than those in urban areas – for 20 to 24-year-olds with full-time, full-year paid employment in 1995, rural females made, on average, \$1,383 less than their urban counterparts. The picture is more complex for employed men.

Conger et al. (1994) and Shanahan et al. (1996) both find that rural youth are more likely than urban youth to spend their wages in ways that supplement the family income. They use their funds to offset household costs, rather than entertainment or leisure items for themselves.

Fellegi (1996), in an analysis of Canada-wide data on employment levels in rural as compared to urban areas, documents considerable variation across the country. In the Western provinces (particularly the Prairies), with a high concentration of farming activities, rural areas tend to

have lower rates of unemployment than urban areas. However, this tends to reflect the fact that farmers are not classified as "unemployed" even during the off-season because they are categorized as owners of a business. Given the diversity of patterns, with some rural regions gaining employment at a faster rate than urban areas, Fellegi concludes that "rurality per se is not a constraint on employment growth." (p. 11).

Given that we have seen that rural youth (and their older counterparts) tend to have lower levels of educational attainment than those in urban areas, it is interesting to consider whether the lack of economic development in rural areas can be attributed to this lack of "human capital". To some extent the jury is still out on that question. McGranahan (1991) concludes that low levels of education are not at the root of the problems facing rural areas in the U.S. (p.5). On the contrary:

"(w)hile raising individual education levels improves individual opportunities and raising the nation's education level should make us more competitive internationally, there is little evidence that raising local education levels is in itself a key to rural employment growth." (p. 8).

Indeed his central conclusion is that "education's potential as a local rural development strategy is probably quite limited" (p.1) given that there is little evidence that the lack of job opportunities reflects a lack of job skills. Similarly Jensen and McLaughlin (1995) conclude from their analysis of data from the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics, that "an anti-poverty strategy that emphasizes human capital enhancement may be particularly ill-suited in non-metro areas." (p. 134). Rather, the need is for development of much needed jobs in those areas.

Bollman (1999b, p. 25) in his analysis of Canadian census data, comes to a slightly different conclusion. Controlling for the industrial structure of employment and the type of region, he does find "a positive (albeit weak) association between employment growth and education levels." Higher education levels provided a slight boost to employment. However, the relationship was not a simple straightforward one. He reports that:

For both rural communities and communities in rural regions, we find that communities with a higher share of their population with lower educational attainment **and** communities with a higher share of their population with higher educational attainment are both associated, weakly, with *higher* employment growth. Some rural communities

with lower skilled workers were able to attract jobs and some rural communities with higher skilled workers were able to attract jobs.” (Ibid., emphasis in original).

The other side of the education/occupation picture focuses on the effect that lower levels of economic opportunities experienced by rural youth have on their educational decisions.

According to Broomhall and Johnson (1994), for those young people with the relevant educational credentials, lack of employment opportunity increases the likelihood of pursuing higher education. These students seem to recognise that there are few opportunities for those who opt to stay in their rural community.

Seyfrit and her colleagues (Seyfrit, 1986; Seyfrit and Danner, 1998; Seyfrit and Hamilton, 1992, 1997; Seyfrit et al., 1998) have undertaken several studies of the ways in which rapid economic growth affects rural youth. She notes that, in many rural areas (whether in Utah, Virginia, Scotland or Newfoundland), the rhetoric of economic development is often the same. Those promoting particular developments (such as oil exploration or mining) in rural areas often cite as a potential benefit the increased opportunities for youth – what Seyfrit calls the “beneficial retention hypothesis.” Her research shows that the assumed benefits are often little evident after the development has been undertaken. Few opportunities, in fact, become available for local youth. Many of the jobs, especially the long term, high paying managerial or highly skilled jobs that become available go to others recruited “from away.” The presence of these rapid-growth industries did little to influence the migration plans of the rural youth in the area.

As will be seen in the next section, migration issues are at the core of much of the debate around rural youth – both for policy makers and for those in rural communities themselves.

4.2 Summary

Employment is very much an issue for rural youth, for those promoting the retention of youth in rural communities, and for those interested in rural economic development. It is clear that employment options for youth are more limited in many rural areas than is the case in urban areas. This situation translates into higher rates of youth unemployment in rural areas; lower rates of labour force participation; limited full-time, full year employment; and the concentration of jobs in occupations that tend to have low wages and few benefits.

Long term rural development policies can help address the underlying issues of rural economic development. In the meantime it is important to identify and address issues directly relating to rural youth.

Given the restricted employment options they face, many rural youth have limited occupational aspirations or expectations. Any move to raise these expectations should, of course, be coupled with increasing youth access to a wider range of options. Raising expectations that cannot be fulfilled is only likely to exacerbate existing problems.

Rural youth seem to spend their employment income differently from urban youth: the former are more likely to contribute to the household income. This practice gives them the right to lay claim to adult status at an earlier age (as does marriage and/or child bearing). Being treated as an adult is an important step which may offset some negative influences on rural youth. Lower household incomes can, in this way, have a positive effect on youth transitions, so long as the income levels are not so low that they create stresses associated with poverty-level subsistence, and so long as they do not mean that the young person has to forego advanced education or training as a result.

Many policy makers focus on the relationship between human capital and the potential for economic growth. At best this relationship appears to be a weak one. The key for employment opportunities for rural youth seems to be less an investment in developing their skills and human capital than in attracting viable, sustainable (rather than rapid growth) jobs to rural areas.

5. Migration

5.1 Migration concerns

There is a growing body of literature that deals with the issue of youth migration from rural communities. A number of Statistics Canada analyses document the extent of this migration, levels of return migration, variation across regions of Canada and variation across time (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000; Dupuy et al., 2000a, 2000b; Fellegi, 1996; Tremblay, 2001). Some of the key points in this literature are outlined below.

It is clear that there is considerable concern about what is perceived to be a net loss of youth from rural areas. The 1993 OECD report (p. 25) summarizes this concern as follows:

Working-age people – especially the best educated younger workers – are attracted elsewhere, sometimes reluctantly, by better employment opportunities. Thus, many rural populations are declining while average ages are rising, endangering the rural fabric, and stimulating emigration.

Lichter et al. (1995) present a similar view bemoaning the fact that this net out-migration of highly qualified youth has seriously depleted the “human capital stock” of rural areas. Fellegi (1996, p. 6) echoes these thoughts in the Canadian context: “Rural youth out-migration is a continuing problem for rural development initiatives. Moving in search of a job has traditionally depleted the human capital complement in rural areas.” Further, Fellegi’s analysis documents that:

Between 1986 and 1991, 19% of rural ... youth moved from rural to urban. Those who moved had a higher labour force participation rate (89%), lower unemployment rate (13%), a higher share were attending school (33%), a high share had some university education (37%) and their incomes were higher. (p. 7).

Given these concerns, it is important to identify both the extent of and the reasons for youth leaving rural areas, as well as examining the extent to which it, in fact, “depletes the human capital” of rural areas.

5.2 Youth migration into and out of rural areas

Recent analyses have shown that rural areas, in Canada and elsewhere, tend to be characterised by net out-migration, especially among those in the age groups 15-24 and 25-29 (Bollman and

Beshiri, 2000; Broomhall and Johnson, 1994; Fellegi, 1996; Tremblay, 2001). So, Dupuy et al. (2000b) report that "During the 1991 to 1996 period, roughly 30% of teenagers (aged 15 to 19) left their rural communities, compared with 18% of their urban counterparts." (p. 61; see also Dupuy et al., 2000a:7). At most, just over half (56%) of rural youth in the 15 to 19 age group are in their original community ten years later (Ibid., p. 23).

Net migration rates, of course, reflect both rates of out-migration and rates of in-migration. Some areas which lose large numbers of rural youth are also able to attract others to "replace" them. While in-migration can provide skilled labour to rural communities and perhaps increase their cultural diversity, in-migrants can also pose a threat to the traditional culture of a closely knit rural community (Rowntree, 1994). Overall, rates of in-migration (including youth) to rural areas and small towns tends to be highest for those areas near large urban centres – what the OECD (1993) calls "integrated" or "urban adjacent" and Fellegi (1996) calls the "urban frontier." What is more, some shift in the proportions in rural and urban areas reflects the reclassification of areas adjacent to urban centres – areas that were considered rural become classified as urban. Even without any physical movement, this process affects the growth of urban areas relative to rural ones (see Mendelson and Bollman, 1998). Overall, "... within constant boundaries at the Canada level, there was a 3% increase in the rural and small town population during 1986-91, followed by a 4% increase ... during 1991-96." (Mendelson and Bollman, 1998: 4).

The pattern of youth migration into and out of rural and small-town areas varies by region of the country (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000; Tremblay, 2001). Out-migration rates are high in the western provinces, and low in the Atlantic region, especially Newfoundland and Labrador (Hajesz and Dawe, 1997). This pattern occurs despite the fact that the Atlantic region has some of the highest unemployment rates and correspondingly lowest employment rates for youth, particularly rural youth. The implication is that the low rates of out-migration in this region reflect the strong ties that these rural youth have to their communities (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000; Hajesz and Dawe, 1997). The fact that rural youth have closer ties to their communities is a well-documented fact and one that creates considerable tension when these young people are making decisions about their educational and occupational futures (Broomhall and Johnson, 1994; House et al., 1989; Jamieson, 2000; Looker, 1993). These decisions can be particularly

problematic for aboriginal youth for whom out-migration means a move to a very different cultural milieu (Donaldson, 1986).

There is also variation in this pattern over time. Both Fellegi (1996) and Bollman and Beshiri (2000) document that patterns of in-migration and out-migration of youth in Canada have shifted in the last three decades. During the 1970s there was what Bollman and Beshiri refer to as the "rural turnaround," with higher net in-migration to rural areas and small towns, reflecting higher rates of in-migration and lower rates of out-migration than during earlier decades. The 1980s evidenced a "turnaround of the turnaround," with net out-migration from rural areas and small towns, due to lower rates of in-migration. Finally, in the 1990s, there was again net in-migration to these areas, this time reflecting lower rates of out-migration.

Much of the out-migration of rural youth is for the age group 15-24. The age group with relatively high rates of in-migration to rural areas and small towns is the 25-29-year-old category (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000; Fellegi, 1996). In other words, rural areas tend to lose the very young, but are able to recruit slightly older youth into their communities.

Although many rural youth say they would like to return to their home community if they leave (Looker, 1993), only a small percentage of them actually do. At most, 25% of out-migrants returned to their original community within ten years (Dupuy et al., 2000a, 2000b; Bollman and Beshiri, 2000). So, the majority of young adults who move to a specific rural area are those from either an urban setting (Dupuy et al., 2000a; Fellegi, 1996) or other rural areas. However, given that much of the research focuses on the issue (the "problem") of youth *out*-migration from rural areas, there is very little information on *in*-migrants – either who they are or why they make this move.

There seem to be two key reasons cited in the literature for youth out-migration from rural areas. Many, particularly those in the 15-24-year-old age group, leave to pursue further education (Bollman and Beshiri, 2000; Dupuy et al., 2000a, 2000b; Jones, 1992; MacKinnon and Looker, 1998). Obtaining this higher education benefits these individuals in many ways, not the least of which is to increase their access to high status, high paying jobs. The fact that those who leave rural areas are characterised by higher levels of education is the basis on which many researchers

conclude that rural out-migrants are the "best and brightest" (Fellegi, 1996). In Broomhall and Johnson's (1994, p. 566) words: "The loss of the community's most productive members reduces the overall productivity of the local workforce, discouraging high quality employers from remaining in, or moving to, these communities." However, it is not always clear from the data whether those with higher education are more likely to move, or if those who are likely to move obtain higher levels of education. Bollman and Beshiri (2000, p. 25) note that:

education is important to migration not only because there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and migration rates. The rate of out-migration from RST (rural and small towns) areas is higher for each level of educational attainment.

However, they find that "... RST also shows a higher in-migration rate for individuals with a higher educational attainment." (p.26). In other words, those with high levels of education tend to be more mobile – they move both in and out of rural and urban areas. Indeed, Bollman and Beshiri conclude that, in times when there is a net in-migration to rural areas (i.e., the 1970s and the early 1990s), there was what they refer to as a "brain gain" rather than a "brain drain." However, one should note the caution put forward by Dupuy et al. (2000a, p. 25):

Even though they have the highest propensity to move, university graduates are only a small fraction of rural movers (7%-9%) because of their low demographic weight. These findings imply that policies that would aim at lowering the percentage of rural movers by focusing only on university graduates would likely have a limited impact on migration statistics."

The second reason cited in the research literature for youth migration from rural areas focuses on employment issues. Those youth who do not leave to pursue higher education are often leaving to pursue job options (Crockett et al., 2000; Huillet, 1997; Johnson and Fuguitt, 2000; Jones, 1992). In their examination of patterns of out-migration for youth in rural Newfoundland, House et al. (1989) find that it tends to be those with low levels of education who are most likely to leave – the males to find employment and the females to follow a mate. Crockett et al. (2000) make a similar argument – that out-migration can provide employment opportunities even for poor and poorly educated youth. MacKinnon and Looker (1998) confirm that many young women in their rural Nova Scotia sample leave their home community to be with a husband or boyfriend.

However, the decision to move is not an easy one for many rural youth (Crockett et al., 2000; Jones 1999). As Looker (1993) documents in some detail, rural youth, including those who recognise that they and other young adults have to leave to make anything of themselves, have strong ties to their communities. The same youth who plan to leave also confirm that "this place will always be home to me," and "even if I leave I am coming back." Indeed both leavers and stayers recognise that there are different value orientations held by those who leave and those who stay. Those who leave are seen as independent, motivated, ambitious or determined. However, few described those who stay in opposite terms (unmotivated, unambitious, etc.). Rather, they were seen as youth with close ties to the community, to whom family and community matter, those with a strong sense of place.

House et al. (1989) see family and community ties as a constraint on leaving. As Broomhall and Johnson (1994, p. 566) note, those youth who opt to stay often pay a price – but a price they are willing to pay.

...Those who have strong preferences for remaining in the community face a discouraging opportunity set. This opportunity set is likely to include substandard housing, lower lifetime earnings, lower quality health care, and less certainty with regard to employment. Those who choose to remain in the community are not necessarily disadvantaged because they lack values or attitudes similar to those elsewhere, but because they have stronger locational preferences which discourage relocation to more prosperous communities.

Fellegi (1996, p. 18) documents many "quality of life" issues that are important to rural youth in their decisions about staying or leaving. These include the fact that personal victimization is 30% lower in rural versus urban areas, reflecting lower levels of theft and assaults; household victimization is 40% lower. "Rural residents are half as likely to feel unsafe when walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark." (Ibid., p. 18). They are half as likely as urban residents to have installed a burglar alarm, new locks, have taken a self defense course, or to have changed their telephone number to guard against crime. Less than a quarter of rural residents, compared to over a third of urban residents, changed their route to work or home, or avoided certain places to keep from being victimized. Overall, the image one gets is that rural residents feel safer, and report less crime than their urban counterparts.

Jones (1992, 2001) looks at the impact of housing on youth decisions to leave rural areas of Scotland. Affordable quality housing is difficult to come by, especially for single youth. Many of those who would otherwise have stayed in their rural community leave in order to access appropriate housing. It is not clear how general this pattern is – and whether or not it would apply to rural areas of Canada.

5.3 Summary

The out-migration of youth from rural communities is a concern to both the communities themselves and to policy makers interested in issues of rural sustainability and rural economic development. The literature reviewed has shown that there has been net out-migration of youth from rural areas, for many recent periods in Canada. However, it has also shown that many rural areas (particularly those with stable and growing economies and those near urban centres) also attract many young people. These are often highly educated young adults, who bring a wealth of skills and experience to the community. The data also show that there is considerable variation across regions of Canada, and across time.

Many of the younger rural youth (aged 15-24, particularly those aged 20-24) leave their home communities to pursue higher education. Although many plan to return once they complete their education, only a minority do so.

Even though they may not be able to return, many rural youth (both stayers and leavers) have strong ties to their community, and see rural areas as having a high quality of life – factors which make the decision about leaving all the more difficult. This is true whether or not leavers see their move as a temporary one (to pursue further education) or a more permanent one.

In general, it is those youth with high levels of education who are most mobile. They are the ones most likely to leave rural areas. They are also the ones most likely to leave urban areas and move to other urban or rural communities. In areas with very few economic opportunities, youth with low levels of education (particularly males) also leave to find work. Young women often leave to join or to follow a mate.

While there is a growing body of information on youth who leave rural communities, there is less detail on those who move *into* these areas. Those interested in maintaining or strengthening

the human capital in rural communities need to look not only at ways communities can retain their youth – but also at how they can attract others while maintaining their cultural integrity.

6. Challenges facing rural youth

Some of the challenges facing rural youth are the limitations they face in their rural schools. Rural schools often do not have the tax base to provide the range of academic or support options that many urban students take for granted. Despite these limitations, rural schools can be as effective, if not more effective than their urban counterparts, given the close contact between teachers and students and their families and the close integration of many rural schools into their communities.

Nevertheless, these limitations can create challenges for rural students if teachers provide little encouragement for advanced education for qualified students. Limited access to a range of courses at the high school level can also disadvantage rural students who want to pursue certain types of post-secondary education.

Many rural youth would see one of the key challenges they face as the tension between their ties to their home community and their desire to obtain gainful, secure employment. Many recognise that they have to leave to obtain a further education, but do not want to do so at the expense of never returning. Some decide to forego further education because of their close ties to the community. The challenge is how to balance the push and pull factors. Those who leave, whether to find work or to extend their education, face the challenge of adjusting to a very different setting at the same time as they are adjusting to leaving home – often without the supports on which they traditionally rely.

It seems that the lack of support services – in the school and in the community – is a challenge facing many rural youth. Many government services are concentrated in urban areas. Rural communities do not have the resources to offer the full range of business or support services that urban areas take for granted. While rural youth have strong informal supports on which they can draw, they have few alternatives if these supports are unavailable.

Many policy makers and researchers have a tendency to portray rural youth and rural communities as only and always disadvantaged. Not only is this not an accurate description of many rural areas (given the wide diversity of economic circumstances in rural regions), it is not

the way many rural youth or their families would describe themselves. It is important that there be a recognition of the strong ties rural youth and other rural residents have to their communities and to build on those ties, rather than focusing solely or primarily on rural "problems."

7. General research questions

It is clear that we need additional research on a number of issues relating to rural youth. In addition to the existing research on youth out-migration from rural areas, there is a need for more focused research on youth *in*-migration. Who moves to rural areas? How does this pattern vary across time and place? Bollman and his colleagues have provided some overview statistics on this, but more detail is needed.

There is little information on the supports needed compared to those which are available to rural youth. Those who stay in rural areas need access to certain types of supports – in the school system, in the employment field, in their community and family lives. Those who move from rural to urban areas need other types of supports – particularly in terms of accessing information about the services that exist in urban areas with which they may be unfamiliar. Certain rural communities are better than others at providing support services to youth – those who stay, those who leave and those who move there. There is a need for better documentation of the resources provided by different rural communities to their youth.

This paper started with the caveat that rural communities and rural youth are very diverse, and that one should exercise caution in dealing with broad generalizations. Yet there is little research on the ways in which the situation facing rural youth varies by sub-groups. There are some interesting comparisons across regions of the country, and some analysis of gender differences – given that region and gender are both easily accessible measures. In order to inform policies in specific locales, much more information on other subgroups is needed. There is some information on aboriginal youth, but not necessarily dealing with rural-urban comparisons. There is less on other subgroups of the Canadian rural population – such as Blacks in Nova Scotia, or linguistic or minority religious groups, such as francophones in Northern Ontario or Mennonites in Alberta. Such research is clearly needed if policy initiatives are to be relevant to these subgroups.

While there is a wealth of data on rural-urban differences in levels of education, there is little if any on rural-urban differences in field of study or type of post-secondary education pursued. On the job training is an important source of skills training for many youth, yet there is little data on the extent or effectiveness of this training that can help inform policy in the area. Such research is needed if we are to get a clearer image of the types of education and training (and the type of human capital) obtained by rural youth.

More focused research would look at sub-groups of rural youth to better identify resilience and risk factors. Who is marginalized in rural areas? How do gender, race, ethnicity, class, aboriginal status, province and area within a province affect rural youth differently from urban youth in terms of educational, employment and migration issues? What holds for farming families on the Prairies may not reflect the experiences of rural youth in Newfoundland, or native youth in the North. What is more, not all youth in a particular area have the same experiences. While many youth count on family support, those from dysfunctional families cannot do so – and have few external support systems to call on. There is a need for more research on the ways in which the general patterns reported here do, or do not, apply to subgroups of Canadian rural youth.

8. Policy relevant research issues

The above overview suggests that there are also challenges facing those interested in policy-relevant research on this topic. It is clear that there are some aspects of rural-urban differences which are well researched (although not always with policy issues in mind). There are other areas about which we know little.

There is considerable interest among policy makers in the general area of rural economic development. The question is whether and under what circumstances specific rural development initiatives provide benefits (or exacerbate problems) for rural youth. There seems to be some evidence that the rapid economic growth that comes with resource extraction developments (such as oil and mining initiatives) may not produce the anticipated benefits of providing jobs for local youth and enticing them to stay in their rural communities. The research issues then are: what types of rural development *do* benefit rural youth, and what subgroups of rural youth tend to benefit? To what extent does local economic development attract workers from elsewhere – and what effect does the presence of these workers have on the local community? Under what circumstances do these in-migrants make a long-term commitment to their new community?

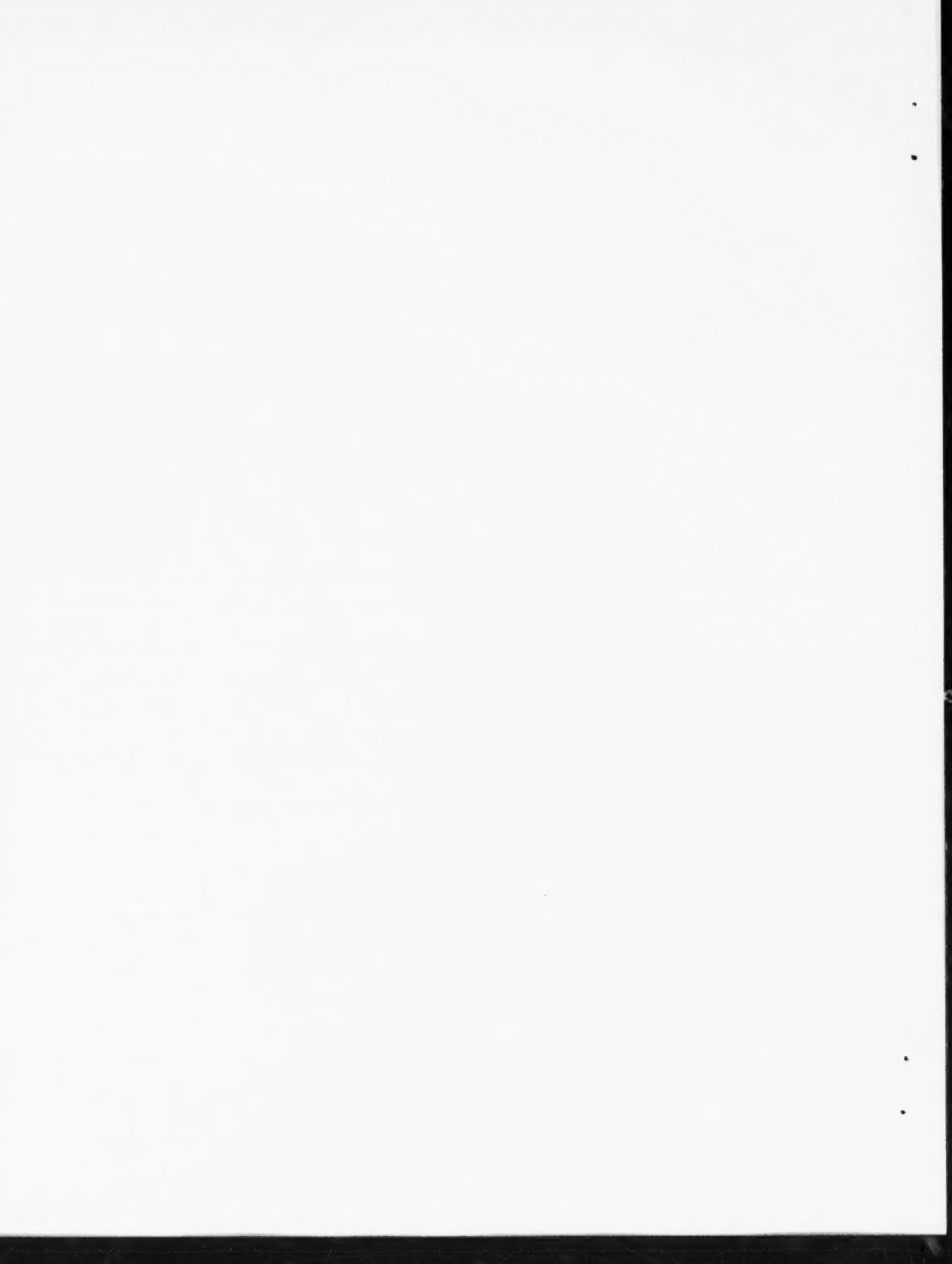
There is much talk in policy circles about the “knowledge-based economy” and the “information society.” New technologies are ostensibly revolutionizing both education and the world of work. To what extent have developments in information technology benefited rural communities and rural youth? To what extent can distance education, facilitated by these new technologies, enhance educational opportunities of rural youth?

Rural Canada is changing – partly through the movement of people from one area to another, but also through the redefinition of municipal boundaries. More and more urban areas are extending their influence as they amalgamate surrounding regions. Will these amalgamations lead to increased access to services for those who live in “rural” areas, now incorporated within city boundaries? Or will the amalgamations simply shift the tax levels and the locus of control experienced by those who live in these areas? What effect does expansion of transportation infrastructure have on rural youth? New roads can transform the relationship between an urban centre and its surrounding rural communities by drastically reducing commuting time, and

therefore opening up educational and employment options as well as access to a range of services to those who have access to transportation. What effect do these developments, in fact, have on rural youth and their access to options and services? Which sub-groups of youth are able to take advantage of these options when they become available? How does access to day care facilities, public or private transportation, and affordable housing, impact differently on young rural women and men?

In general, programs and infrastructure that increase the access of rural youth and rural communities to information and services can have an impact. The question is what forms of infrastructure have this effect. What sorts of services in fact help rural youth in their job searches, in job creation and in coping with problems as they arise? What sorts of policy initiatives assist (or create barriers) for rural youth?

One last issue that is critical to any policy-relevant research agenda is the need for systematic evaluation of policy initiatives. As Thiessen and Looker (1999) document, if one simply asks those responsible for a program or initiative and/or those who successfully completed a program, the picture will almost always be one that the program was an unqualified success. Those who feel otherwise tend not to stay in the program. Only by having time-ordered "before and after" data, *and* data from a comparable control group can one identify with confidence the actual effect of a program or policy on the participants.



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